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USING INDIVIDUALIZED READING AS A DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUE.

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THE IDENTIFICATION AND RECTIFICATION OF PERSONAL READING NEEDS THROUGH INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROCEDURES ARE DISCUSSED. THE SHIFT OF CORRECTIVE READING FROM GROUP TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS IS URGED. REMEDIATION SHOULD BEGIN WITH TOPICS AGREEABLE AND ENJOYABLE TO THE LEARNER. THROUGH PUPIL CONFERENCES AND AN INFORMAL READING INVENTORY USING THIS TYPE OF MATERIAL, REMEDIATION AND SKILL GROWTH CAN BE DIRECTED AND MOTIVATED TOWARD PERSONAL SATISFACTION. CONTINUAL DIAGNOSIS OF NEEDS IS DEPENDENT ON DETAILED ANECDOTAL RECORDS CONCERNING PUPIL INTERESTS, FREE READING, AND A SKILL BUILDING PROFILE. SHARING THE FINDINGS WITH EACH CHILD, HIS PARENTS, AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL STAFF MEMBERS IS RECOMMENDED AS A POSSIBLE AID TO HEALTHY IMPROVEMENT OF SKILLS AND SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF DISABILITIES. REFERENCES ARE LISTED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (BOSTON, APRIL 24-27, 1968). (MC)

[INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION, BOSTON, APRIL 24-27, 1968]

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SESSIONS

Section: Diagnosis in the Classroom

Identification and Diagnosis of Reading Disability
Thursday, April 25, 1968
1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

USING INDIVIDUALIZED READING AS A DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUE

Diagnosing reading skills basically means finding out about a students reading strengths and deficiencies. Individualized reading, with proper attention to record keeping, is one of the most promising of all techniques for gathering specific data about the reading status of a student. It is an approach, Carline (2) says "to teaching reading in which the teacher must focus attention on each childs' abilities, interests, and needs."

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The growing interest in individualized reading, reflected in reading labs, kits, texts and in the literature, has focused increased attention upon unique traits of the individual as a learner. With less and less reference to inflexible and rigid grouping arrangements, individualized reading procedures are filling a vacuum in the identification and rectification of personal reading needs. It is, writes Manning (4), "one of the refreshing innovations that has moved into current practice."

All reading teachers should show concern for at least four major considerations. These are progress in the simple mechanics of independent

word attack, comprehension of essential thoughts and cognition, word recognition and conceptualization, and rate of reading. Any attempt to correct deficiencies must ultimately deal with the specifics of these considerations. The blanket approach, a continuous program of developmental reading without concern for the individuals personal reading profile, will not do the job by design and rarely by chance.

Individual Versus Group Teaching

The primary teacher tends to emphasize the mechanics of reading and may minimize his obligations to the other considerations. In contrast, the middle grade teacher and the secondary teacher are prone to give more attention to comprehension and word recognition. Even the better reading teachers often neglect some aspects of a balanced program. This is why corrective reading emphasis should be shifted from group needs to individual needs. What is good for the group may not necessarily meet the requirements of individuals within the group. Teachers must come to realize that in the long run, individualized reading is more considerate of her time than group teaching. Of course, group instruction, large or small, is fine when the needs of the group are the same. It takes diagnostic teaching and evaluation to determine this. Before wasting the time of the total class by teaching a skill, it is sensible to determine which individuals or small groups need the help.

Vary Material

An individualized reading program permits and encourages the reader to select his own material for reading. An observation and notation of what is selected by the child affords the teacher a fine opportunity to diagnose interests and levels of readability. Remediation of disabilities should begin with topics that are agreeable to and enjoyable to the learner.

Better observation of interests through self-selection is usually possible when there is a readily available source of material near at hand. This means a classroom library to supplement the school library. Dolch (3), in his booklet Better Reading in Your Schools, recognized the importance of having a classroom library when he wrote, "Books in the room are best, even if the teacher of each room goes to the library each month and temporarily borrows a lot of books. In doing so, he will think of particular children who need the books." The stress is upon individual needs and abilities in handling different books in contrast to group needs in handling a single level text.

The Conference

Basic to all individualized reading is a conference. The conference offers the most inviting opportunity to learn about specific reading skills. The information recorded during the conference points out the path the teacher should follow to improve the childs reading ability. Recognizing the needs however is not enough. During every conference some notations should be made and filed in a folder reserved for the particular child. The books used in the conference may be taken from a graded or nongraded selection. It is important, however, to have some selections taken from graded selections occasionally to serve as an informal inventory of skills with known levels of readability.

A Reading Inventory

If a child makes a selection from a non-graded source, the teacher should note how well the material is handled in terms of word reading accuracy and degree of comprehension. In a one hundred word sample a child should never make more than 2 to 4 errors if the material is to be considered

instructional. Following some silent reading, an immediate satisfactory response to about 2 of 3 or 3 of 4 questions is sufficient.

When checking word reading errors it is convenient to follow the childs' oral reading and register missed words by simply extending a finger for each error. Five fingers means five errors. This is too many errors per hundred for successful instruction except in rare cases where the content interest for the child neutralizes heavy vocabulary loads.

In counting errors, include about six kinds: repetition of more than one word, insertion of words, omission of words, reversals of words or phrases, substitution of words and requests for help in pronouncing or getting the meaning of a word. In determining a reading level the number of errors is more important than the kind of error. For remediation, however, it is most helpful to know the kind of errors the child tends to make. Most errors often appear to be repetions of the same kind of mistake.

Guiding Skill Growth

For economy of time and for diagnostic purposes, specific word attack skills may be taught to the whole group. A simple oral or written evaluation following a skills lesson reflects needs of particular children who might be regrouped for further teaching. A skills list may be taken from the basal reader guide books, a curriculum guide or an outline such as Barbe's (1).

An analysis of reading interests, comprehension and cognition may come from three sources. One source is a short written response from the child. This should not be confused with the conventional book report. Conventional book reporting too frequently discourages reading and reporting of any kind. A short form with a request to say "whatever you like" about a book is enough. Supplementary judgments come from listening to

"booktalks" given informally by children for their classmates. The lack of interest or motivation to talk about a book can often be just as informative as a long irrelevant discourse.

Individual conferences help the teacher to acquire a deeper understanding of a child's specialized vocabulary. His specialized vocabulary may reflect knowledge of subjects and topics foreign to his peers who may, otherwise, be regarded as superior readers.

The words a child stumbles on are very personal ones. They are personal because they represent a current, obvious obstruction to reading about something he has shown a desire to read — not a choice selected by someone else. These words should be recorded by the teacher and shared with the student. It is usually helpful to have the child add these words to his personal word list. There should never be a penalty for missing words from a personal selection. A penalty, in the form of lowered grades or extra assignments works to the disadvantage of the learner and counteracts the rewards of acquiring an exspansive vocabulary. Coming to grips with more and more special words is a basic goal of the individualized reading teacher. Encouraging a bypass rather than facing the challenge of greater word recognition and conceptualization is not consistent with a sound philosophy of teaching reading.

Rate of reading tells the teacher something about the child's needs. Rates should be regularly judged from free selected, independent level material. In other words, make judgments from the child's selection because this is the type material that concerns him most. The free level or independent material should be relatively easy in terms of vocabulary load and meaning.

To make contrasts in rate improvement when progress is noted in other skills, it is helpful to have a record of reading facility before the

corrective measures were taken and following the effort. For this it is convenient to pick several selections of graded material (about 200 words in each) and judge rate at an easy level by having the same material read before and after the skills improvement was noted.

Emphasis for remedial purposes is not placed upon rate of reading but upon the improvement of word attack and comprehension. Nevertheless, a slow reader reflects his difficulties in his vocabulary and understanding. As a child's word recognition, word concepts and comprehension ability grow, rate usually improves. When a child reads slowly with few mistakes and maintains a high level of understanding, attention should then be given to an improved rate in keeping with the child's abilities. Tables of norms for various grade levels are available in a number of texts. The teacher should be cautioned about seeking to bring rates or any other skill up to grade level for any child unless the potential is compatable with the norms. The norms are for reference and help a teacher measure her group in comparison with the larger test sample. They become a harmful reference if they are looked upon as standards for every child to attain.

Using The Records

The record an individual reading teacher keeps is an essentail factor in her continual diagnosis of reading needs. During each conference the teacher should be prepared to make short notations about missed words, number of words missed per 100, silent reading comprehension, oral reading fluency, rate and any word recognition technique that the child appears to need.

Information gained from the conference, records of kinds and numbers of books read, book talks and discussion, help the teacher and others interested in a childs progress to get a fuller picture of his reading

profile. It is worthwhile to share the findings with the student, his parents, the supervising staff and any others whose understanding of personal needs might lead to a healthy improvement of skills and a sympathetic understanding of disabilities.

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